

# Perceptive on Indian Diaspora with Chase of Identity and Colliding Cultures

Dr. Suchitra Vashisth

Associate Professor, MRI University, Faridabad, India

**Abstract**— *The Diaspora writers render the extent and multifaceted nature of the country which owns multiples of all things – multiple actualities, multiple veracities and multiple issues and this range are brought to the notice of the people wide-reaching. The term Diaspora which was used to put forward to Jewish diffusion is being now used to submit to current situations that engross the experiences of deportee workers, refugees, exiles, immigrants and cultural communities. The Diaspora writers have enriched the English literature with their notable assistance. The prying involves disarticulation or dislocation in cultural aspects rather than sheer ecological dislodgment. The problems they deal with in their works are generally the hardships faced by immigrants, refugees and exiles. Diaspora works when viewed in a wider sense reveals their facets enabling the comprehension of different cultures.*

**Keywords**— *Diaspora, Immigrants, Indian.*

The sense of homelessness which each émigré senses is genuine and compelling. Bhiku Parekh asserts that the Diaspora Indian is “like the banyan tree, the traditional symbol of the Indian way of life, he spreads out his roots in several soils, drawing nourishment from one when the rest dry up. Far from being homeless, he has several homes, and that is the only way he increasingly comes to feel at home in the world.”<sup>1</sup>

Diaspora has been framed by a diffusion of population and not, in the Jewish outset, an accumulation disappearance of population at a specific period of time. The current Diaspora Indian writers can be divided into two different Categories. One group encompasses those who have harbored in the shores of foreign countries after spending a part of their lives in India. The second category includes those who dwell away from India since birth and hence look at India as an interesting origin of their legacy. The writers of the first group have an accurate dislodgment whereas those incorporated in the second group regard themselves as Rootless. Both the categories of writers have generated a pleasing volume of English fictions. The primary aspects of the Diaspora writings are the quest for identity, Uprooting

and transplantation, diverse inner and outer psyches, reminiscence and trivial feeling of culpability. The Diaspora writers return to their native country for numerous reasons. For instance, Naipaul comes back to India to walk around his roots. Rushdie turns to India to grasp its history.

The first generation Diaspora Indian writers have proved themselves by Bagging several literary awards and honors. Yet, belatedly, the position of the second generation Diaspora writers has full-fledged enormously and most of them have achieved appreciation worldwide. MeeraSyal, who was born in England, has prolifically Thrown light on the living of both first generation and second generation nonresident Indians in the West in her creations *Anita and Me* and *Life Isn't All Ha HaHeeHee*. Hari Kunzru in his novel *Transmission* projects the lives of three varied characters Leela Zahir, an actress, Arjun Mehta, a computer expert, and Guy Swift, a marketing executive – are travelling in that order through Bollywood, the Silicon Valley, and London. Sunetra Gupta has portrayed both the delight and grief in Intercultural interactions through characters such as Moni and Niharika in her novels *Memories of Rain* and *A Sin of Colour*. Jhumpa Lahiri's book of short stories *Interpreter of Maladies* and her novel *The Namesake* convincingly epitomize the lives of first generation as well as second generation Indian immigrants in America. Fictions written in the contexts of Diaspora alter languages and cultural ethnicity. Examination of their novels from a cross-cultural perspective can help to determine the prolific novel ways of thinking and expression. Globalization has also shaped new patterns of immigration and received several responses all around the world. The evident blending outcome of globalization cannot conceal the deviating responses it has provoked in different regions. Queries of Diaspora inducing with a specific force: pressure between internationalism and nationalism; the tie between location and identity; and the ways of interface of cultures and literature. Fresh models of movement are originating in the drift of migration and exclusions. Migration from centers of capitalist economies to cosmopolitan pockets in the margins ('first' to 'second' or 'third' worlds), migration from deprived economies to lands

of opportunities ('third' and 'second' worlds to 'first' world, or margins to the cosmopolitan centers within the 'third' world), seem fertile ground for new forms of identity politics. New articulations of Diaspora, necessarily overlapping with familiar ways of conceptualizing it, have found their way to literary writings.<sup>2</sup>

Bharati Mukherjee is one of the major novelists of Indian Diaspora who has achieved an eminent position within a comparatively short artistic span. As an deportee in the United States, Bharati Mukherjee has captured persuasively the Indian immigrant experiences in her novels and collections of short stories. Bharati Mukherjee's first novel *The Tiger's Daughter* illustrates the rootless of Tara Banerjee, the protagonist of the novel. The plot emphasizes the requisite to redefine the notions like home or homeland and identity from the view of an immigrant. The novel observes the protagonist as an exile in both the homeland as well as in the adopted land. Tara goes to America for higher studies, marries an American there and returns to India after seven years. The plot is drawn on the author's own experience and those of her sisters who had been to America for higher studies. Her second novel *Wife* depicts the existence of the protagonist, Dimple Dasgupta, as an expatriate in the US. She is torn between the roles of a traditional Indian wife and an assertive wife of the west. Though she makes efforts to establish contact with the host culture, she finally becomes a disillusioned expatriate and succumbs to cultural or social pressures. Dimple, a docile young Bengali girl dreams about her marriage and subsequently marries off Amit Basu, an engineer expecting to emigrate to US. She lives in dreams and believes her marriage and migration to US will bring her a new life of happiness. Unfortunately, her alien environment and cultural trauma at US forces her to stab her husband to death and commit suicide. *Jasmine*, the most acclaimed novel succeeded *Wife* explains the story of a Punjabi peasant girl, Jyoti who transforms as an assimilated immigrant. Jyoti, widowed at a young age decides to migrate to America as Jasmine to fulfill her husband's dreams. Meanwhile, she takes revenge on her husband's murderer and the rapist. She utilizes every opportunity to become an American and undergoes the process of transformation into Jazzy-Jase-Jane to get assimilated into the new culture. She learns to live for herself, abandoning the bondages of caste, gender and family. Eventually, she emerges as a winner against unfavorable circumstances and shapes a new life in the alien society. This novel is notable in Mukherjee's oeuvre because with the publication of this novel, the phase of 'expatriation' terminates and the phase of immigration starts in her career as an 'immigrant' and also an 'immigrant' story-teller. Her

next novel, *The Holder of the World* deals with tensions, aspirations and ambitions of Hannah Easton, the protagonist. The story establishes expatriation as a journey of the human mind. Hannah Easton, born in Massachusetts moves to India and becomes the lover of a king who gives her a diamond named as 'Emperor's Tear'. The tale goes on with the detective looking for the diamond and revolves around Hannah Easton's perspective. Eventually, the female protagonist reaches her native as a probed or translated self, achieving self-recognition.

In her fifth novel *Leave It to Me*, the novelist discusses the hunger of Debbie Di Martino, the leading character of the novel, to get linked to her biological parents who are a Californian hippie and a Eurasian serial killer. The plot describes the contradicting eastern and western world, Debby's search for true identity and mother-daughter relationship via the emotional and political indulging of Debby in her thirst for revenge. The novel aids the author to problematize the stereotypical notions of identity, culture and nationality. Her sixth novel, *The Desirable Daughters* depicts the life of immigrants. The author deals with familial bonds, feeling of belonging and identity crisis in this novel. Few of the themes treated in this novel include acceptance of the 'new', values of the American culture, second generation and their values and morals. The story narrates the attitude and approaches of Padma, Parvati and Tara (symbolic names of Hindu Goddess Sakthi), the three sisters to various situations. As the title explicates, the sisters are the daughters who make the parents proud or for whom every parent would long for. The three sisters, daughters of Motilal Bhattacharjee and the great grand- daughters of Jai Krishna Gangooli, hail from a traditional Bengali Brahmin family. Padma and Parvati make their own choices, former, an immigrant in New Jersey and the latter, had a love marriage and settled in Bombay. Padma is regarded as the hyphenated Indian, which the author refuses to settle for as an 'immigrant' in the U.S. Parvati is an ideal, traditional Indian wife. Tara is the narrator of the novel and lives the author's version of cultural hybridity. Tara marries Bishwapriya Chatterjee, a choice of her parents and identifies her marital life as a failure. She settles on an American divorce and sends her son with his father. She quits her traditional life and starts a fresh love life with Andy. The novel testifies the fluidity of her identity as well that of the immigrants. Lastly, Tara returns to her father's home for comfort. The novel has autobiographical elements.

Her seventh novel *The Tree Bride* relates the past incidents with the present circumstances of Tara's life of *Desirable Daughters*. The socio-cultural and political history of Bengal is interwoven into a fabric in this novel. The novel is a

'historiographic-metafiction', which tells the impact of colonialism on Bengali minds. The problems confronted by the British officers in India are discussed in the plot. The novel proves that there exists convergence but not coincidences in the universe. Attempts to evaluate past history of own culture to reconstruct the present, when living in an alien culture is the key feature of the story. Tara's root search to discover her identity leads to several surprises. The plot moves back and forth in time between pre-independent India and San Francisco. The short story collections of Bharti Mukherjee are built round the deep-rooted racism in Canada. The stories in *Darkness* celebrate the changes of 'Aloofness of expatriation' to the 'Exuberance of immigration'. These stories specify the problems in the life of South-Asian, African and Caribbean immigrants, some of them are narrated from the viewpoint of whites too. The plots involve the traditional theme of Diaspora of cast out and immigration, necessity of all acts of courage and will and all the shocks, satires and failures associated.

Bharati Mukherjee's eighth novel *Miss New India* indulges in many new clichés. The heroine of *Miss New India* is a young woman, Anjali Bose, who escapes the constrictions of small-town Bihar, one of India's most backward states, for the promise of Bangalore, one of the country's (and the world's) fastest growing cities. There she works at a call centre, falls in love, meets dynamic young entrepreneurs and marvels at the fortunes being made all around her. She encounters her share of hardships, police brutality, real-estate sharks but ultimately succeeds in reinventing herself. *The Middleman and Other Stories* is a collection of short stories with a mythic baggage. The collection enumerates what happens when the third world meets the first and covers the perspective of various immigrants such as Tamil, Sri Lankan who fall in love on the way to America. The book expresses the resourcefulness of the immigrants in their domicile through the narrative voices of the characters, male and female, young and old. The author utilizes her Indian background to translate into the American experience, which is evident from the shift of her focus from themes of expatriation and nostalgia to the exciting features of the American melting pot. In fact, the author interprets the two cultures as a middleman. The third world immigrants, the characters of *The Middleman and Other Stories* are conquerors who boldly claim their rights in the adopted land. In *Days and Nights in Calcutta*, a collaborative work with her husband, the author accounts her own experiences during one year sojourn in Calcutta with her husband. She writes about the urgency of her life, life of a particular class at a particular period of Calcutta's history. The work reveals that she considers herself as an Indian woman who has left her

home to settle in the west. She also looks over the possibilities of her life in India if she would have not refrained. While writing this book, she realized that despite the cultural conflicts she was facing in Canada, it was still the new world that she wanted to live in. Another non-fictional work that she collaborated with her husband was *The Sorrow and Terror: The Haunting Legacy of the Air India Tragedy*. It details the crash of the Air India plane, off the coast of Ireland, during its flight from Toronto to Bombay. The crash ended the lives of three hundred and twenty nine persons, mostly Canadians of Indian origin. The tragedy was perceived only as an Indian disaster by the Canadian government, as illustrated by the author. Her first novel, *The Tiger's Daughter* manifests the cultural conflict faced by Tara Banerjee, an upper class Bengali Brahmin girl who goes to America for higher studies. Though she experiences a tough time there in the beginning, she adapts to the alien culture by entering into wedlock with an American. She, like the author comes across bewilderment when she comes back to India after seven years. She discovers that the country has changed a lot since she departed and visualizes a strange society with the impressions of poverty, hungry children and political issues. She also realizes that she has not blended into the American culture but also cannot hold the values and morals of her native country. The author's *Days and Nights in Calcutta* exemplifies the strong autobiographical strain in *The Tiger's Daughter*. The author claims in an interview with Geoffrey Hancock that she is not an autobiographical writer but her obsessions reveal themselves in metaphor and language. However, the novel reflects the author's own experience and her sister's experience at Vassar.<sup>3</sup>

Bharati Mukherjee had to establish her own identity in a foreign land, tackling the conflict between two different cultures and to struggle against racial discrimination while she was in Canada. Her immigrant experience is very much reflected in all her novels. The bitter experience of Bharati Mukherjee in Canada is portrayed in her earlier works like *Jasmine*, *Darkness* and *The Middleman and Other Stories*. Tara in *The Tiger's Daughter* to Debbie in *Leave it to Me*, Dimple Dasgupta in *Wife* to Hannah Easton in *The Holder of the World*, illustrate a part of the author's early and late life, first as an expatriate and then as an immigrant. Jasmine is a perfect blend of characteristics of feminine idols of Sita and Kali; visualized as an embodiment of feminism and a human being aware of self; her achievements through self-determination and self-efficacy are praiseworthy. Transformation of Bharati Mukherjee is evident in *The Middleman and Other Stories*, particularly as characters Panna in "A Wife's Story" and Maya Sanyal in "The

*Tenant*". Maya is a naturalized American leading a free life variant to Indian standards. Panna is boundless of Indian in-laws and refuses to return with her husband to India not willing to lose the freedom she has in America. *Darkness* is full of characters trying to gain foothold in the new environment whereas the characters of *The Middleman and Other Stories* comprise of who are already there or are trying to accomplish their dreams. Tara Chatterjee in *Desirable Daughters* is simultaneously an Indian and an American and she has acquired the third space of enunciation. Padma is a hyphenated immigrant and Parvati is the icon of a traditional Indian wife with the western orientation. Each one lives in her own way of immigrant life. Both Tara and Padma question their identity and are self-empowered despite floating rootless. Tara looks at the nation, identity and culture in a postcolonial way and she sweeps between traditional and modern clutches. Though she is comfortable with her American identity, still she believes that she belongs to India. She is similar to Hannah of *The Holder of the World* who tries to resurrect her present. Yet, she is fluid that she glides from her husband to her lover back to her husband as a lover. Tara Lata in *The Tree Bride* is married to a Sundari tree to prevent life-long widowhood and stays in her paternal house like the tree, empowering the freedom movement, healing and praying for the people around. She resembles Hannah Easton in *The Holder of the World*, who is a healer.

In the novel *Jasmine*, it is self-assertion that transplants self-fashioning in the adopted land that does not easily approve the immigrants. Jyoti, an exile in America is sexually abused on her entry into the multiethnic nation. Yet, this does not hamper her from pursuing her American dream besides being an illegal immigrant. She murders her rapist and abandons her embarrassment by incessantly rejuvenating herself as Jasmine, Jase, and Jane Ripplemeyer. She protects her self-respect by emphasizing her new identities in an endless process of self-realization similar to breathing. Jasmine's every movement is a calculated step into her Americanization and with each development a vital change is marked in her personality. Jasmine's flight to Iowa and her renaming as Jane is indicative of a slow but a steady immersion into the mainstream American culture. Here we encounter a changed Jasmine—one who has murdered Half-Face for violating her chastity, now not only willingly embraces the company of an American without marriage but also is carrying his child in her womb.<sup>4</sup> Jasmine herself asserts: Once we start letting go, let go just one thing, like not wearing our normal clothes, or a turban or not wearing a tika on the forehead — the rest goes on its own down a sinkhole.<sup>5</sup> As Jasmine is attempting to assimilate into a culture that is not very receptive and hence she retains her

suspensions as well as her Indian self. Though she can talk, walk and wear like Americans she can believe only Asians: I trust only Asian doctors, Asian professionals. What we've gone through must count for something.<sup>6</sup> She is admired for her Indian self, which has made her a lovable and caring wife, an affectionate mother.<sup>7</sup> Nagendra Kumar explains that had she been purely guided by the American values, she should have abandoned Bud at the time of his disability.<sup>8</sup> Jasmine gets incorporated in the American society partly due to her assumed American and partly due to her intact Indian, hence she exists as a hybrid.

Bharati Mukherjee who has married a Canadian narrates her American experience and the convergence of two cultures very clearly: I was not right to describe the American experience as one of the melting pot but a more appropriate word would be fusion<sup>9</sup> because immigrants in America did not melt into or were forged into something like their white counterpart but immigration was a two way process and both the whites and immigrants were growing into a third thing by this interchange and experience.<sup>9</sup> Thus, the postmodern fictions of Bharati Mukherjee such as *The Tiger's Daughter* and *Wife* represent the expatriates who are overwhelmed by the sting of nostalgia. The despair developed in their lives swallows them and makes them marooned between the duality of us/them, self/other, inside/outside and center/periphery.<sup>10</sup> Any study of her novels cannot ignore this important dimension of her art.

## REFERENCES

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